

I'm Paul Freundlich, already a senior citizen myself, whose mother passed away at the age of 96, 2 years ago. I learned a great deal from what my mother experienced, and take this bill as both an opportunity and obligation to contribute to the dialog, and hopefully House Bill 6645's passage.

My mother lived a full life, both in terms of marriage, friendships and society. In the '50s, she helped desegregate social institutions in White Plains, New York, working closely with the leadership of the Urban League and NAACP; and after moving to Florida with my father, took a leading role in securing the rights of migrant labor, and African-Americans, through her church and county government. With a grandfather who was one of the founders of the American Labor movement, and a physician father who equally treated the wealthy and the underprivileged, her social outreach was taken as a matter of course.

My mother lived comfortably in Florida and traveled widely. Books and ideas she shared with me and her grandchildren.

In her '80s, still active and healthy, she initiated conversations with me about her future. She embraced life for its quality, not as an endurance test. Her strong preference was that when her quality of life diminished, that she be able to end it. Into her '90s, I helped her research the possibilities. I was traveling frequently to Europe on business, and particularly focused on the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as the State of Oregon, all of which had favorable laws regarding assisted suicide. The reality, however, was that none of these governmental entities were anxious to encourage a flood of visitors searching for termination options. Residency of at least six months and a terminal prognosis were required.

The net was that we did what so many do: hope for the best.

From the distance of Connecticut, even with frequent family visits, I watched my mother's decline from independent living to assisted living to dementia-driven upscale full support. Her last year and a half were spent initially in our Higganum home, then at the Village at South Farms, finally in a Middletown nursing home. Even as her capacity diminished, there were mutual pleasures in good food and visits, and if I was reading her from the same Oz books she had read me and my sons, that seemed appropriate. She passed away surrounded by loving family, naturally, without any extreme medical interventions.

If all that sounds like a sweet story, well, perhaps it was. If we hadn't been able and willing to apply all her savings and some of ours to the best possible situations, it could have and would have been much worse. Yet from all the talks we had, I know that she would have been shocked and saddened to see well into six figures going to support the end of her life, when she would have seen a better use for us, or channeled to the social causes she believed in so strongly.

My mother said during all the time, both before and even during her dementia, that she had wonderful memories of her life, and was ready to go. The reality we became quickly aware of in her rapid decline was that she might be ready, but the legal system was not. Do I treasure the time we had at the end? I was glad to make her time as pleasant as possible. What I treasure is the loving friendship we had over the course of her life. I didn't need, and she didn't need the coda of trailing into dementia.

I propose in this testimony in both our voices that there are not unlimited resources. Whether it is time, money or love, they should be applied to making the world a better place: a healthy environment, education of the young, support in dignity for those in their aging. The largest generation in American history is entering the last phase of their lives. Wasting valuable resources on prolonging life past its natural span at huge cost to the society is a disaster already stressing our nation.

Death with dignity should be an individual option, accomplished in the most humane and loving ways, not proscribed by government or forbidden by someone else's moral code. I support assisted suicide both for the benefit of society, and for the human beings who face the end of their life, including, in my own time, myself.

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